

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DACCA 04876 271040Z

16

ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

VO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4690

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI NIACT IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 4876

NEW DELHI FOR SECRETARY'S PARTY

E.O.,11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, BG, US, IN, UR

SUBJECT: MUJIB OUSTS TAJUDDIN AS FINANCE MINISTER

1. FINANCE MINISTER TAJUDDIN AHMAD, LEADER OF AWAMI LEAGUE LEFT, PRINCIPAL ADVOCATE IN CABINET OF SOCIALISM, AND FIRM FRIEND OF INDIA AND SOVIET UNION, RESIGNED SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26. HE WAS ASKED TO DO SO "IN THE GREATER INTEREST OF THE NATION" BY PRIMIN SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN. TAJUDDIN HAS SO FAR ISSUED NO STATEMENT AND HAS TOLD PRESS ONLY THAT THEY MUST BE SATISFIED WITH THE BRIEF OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT.

2. BREVITY OF ANNOUNCEMENT AND TAJUDDIN'S RETICENCE HAVE LEFT OBSERVERS FREE TO SPECULATE AS TO UNDERLYING REASONS FOR MUJIB'S ACTION. TAJUDDIN HAS BEEN RESTLESS MEMBER OF BDG AND FREQUENTLY IN PUBLIC CRITICIZED ITS POLICIES AND ACTIONS. MOST RECENT OCCASION WAS AIRPORT STATEMENT OCTOBER 13 ON HIS RETURN FROM 37-DAY OFFICIAL TRIP ABROAD. TAJUDDIN URGED THAT NEEDS OF COUNTRY IN FACE OF FAMINE BE PLACED ABOVE POLITICS THROUGH ALL-PARTY EFFORT TO FIND A SOLUTION; IN URGING ALL-PART COOPERATION, TAJUDDIN WAS QUITE OPENLY CRITICIZING COMPETENCE OF AWAMI LEAGUE GOVERNMENT. MOREOVER, FORMER FINANCE MINISTER HAS LONG BEEN OPPOSED TO TRENDS

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 DACCA 04876 271040Z

TOWARD MORE PRAGMATIC APPROACHES TO ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, EXPRESSING

BELIEF THAT ATTITUDES OF AUSTERITY AND SELF RELIANCE COULD MAKE SOCIALISM A REALITY IN BANGLADESH. WHILE MODERATING HIS EARLIER DISAVOWAL OF FOREIGN AID, TAJUDDIN HAS CONTINUED TO STRESS THAT NATURE AND QUALITY OF AID WOULD DEPEND UPON WHAT BANGLADESH DID FOR ITSELF. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT HE ALSO IS UNHAPPY WITH MANNER IN WHICH CONSORTIUM APPROACH TO FOREIGN ASSISTANCE APPEARED TO BE DEVELOPING.

3. AN ADDITIONAL FENTOR IN HIS OUSTER MAY BE HIS OPPOSITION TO MUJIB'S PURPORTED PLAN TO AMEND CONSTITUTION AND INSTITUTE A MORE CENTRALIZED, AND POSSIBLY MORE AUTHORITARIAN, PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM. NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS IN RECENT DAYS, ANNOUNCING PARLIAMENTARY SESSION IN LATE NOVEMBER, HAVE FOR THE FIRST TIME PUBLICLY SPECULATED THAT MUJIB WILL AMEND THE CONSTITUTION TO ALTER THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT. WHILE WE HAVE HEARD OF NO AWAMI LEAGUERS OF ANY STATURE WHO ARE IN FAVOR OF THE ANTICIPATED CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE, THE OPPOSITION OF TAJUDDIN, BECAUSE OF HIS FREQUENT CONFLICTS WITH MUJIB AND HIS CLEAR-CUT LEADERSHIP OF THE LEFT-WING OF THE PARTY, WOULD BE OF CONSIDERABLE SIGNIFICANCE.

4. IT IS ALSO CONCEIVABLE THAT MUJIB'S REQUEST FOR THE RESIGNATION IS A PREEMPTIVE MOVE TO UNDERCUT TAJUDDIN'S POWER AND LEADERSHIP OF THE LEFT FACTION. SIGNIFICANTLY, MUJIB, IN ADDITION TO SEEKING CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE, IS SAID TO BE CONSIDERING A ONE-PARTY SYSTEM BY WHICH HE WOULD ACCEPT INTO THE AWAMI LEAGUE AND GIVE SOME GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY TO THE CPB AND NAP/MUZAFFAR, CO-"PATRIOTIC" PARTIES CLOSE TO TAJUDDIN PHILOSOPHICALLY AND IN THEIR ESPOUSAL OF GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE USSR AND INDIA. THE CO-OPTION, IF IMPLEMENTED, MIGHT ASSUAGE THE INTERESTS OF THE LEFT WING, BUT MUJIB STILL HAS TO DEAL WITH HIS MODERATE WING, WHICH IS EQUALLY UNHAPPY WITH HIS DIRECTION OF THE GOVERNMENT AND HIS SEEMING TURN TOWARD GREATER PERSONAL CONTROL.

5. ALTHOUGH A BREAK BETWEEN MUJIBSAND TAJUDDIN HAS BEEN A SUBJECT OF SPECULATION ALMOST SINCE THE INCEPTION OF INDEPENDENT BANGLADESH, THE ABSENCE OF STATED REASONS FOR THE RESIGNATION AND ITS TIMING ALLOWS BENGALLEES TO PLAY WITH THE IDEA THET TAJUDDIN'S DEPARTURE TRANSCENDS DOMESTIC ISSUES AND IS IN SOME WAY CONNECTED WITH THE PRIMIN'S RECENT VISIT TO WASHINGTON, OUR ROLE IN THE CONSORTIUM, AND THE IMMINENT ARRIVAL OF DR. KISSINGER. THE INEVITABLE SPECULATION THAT THIS ACTION, AGAINST THE BACKGROUND

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PAGE 03 DACCA 04876 271040Z

OF TAJUDDIN'S PRO-SOVIET AND ANTI-AMERICAN REPUTATION, IS LINKED TO THE SECRETARY'S VISIT AND BANGLADESH'S "OPENING TO THE WEST" ALSO COLORS THE SPECULATION HEARD HERE ABOUT THE IDENTITY OF HIS SUCCESSOR.

6. IN HOURS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING TAJUDDIN'S DEPARTURE, FORMER COMMERCE MINISTER M.R. SIDDIQUI HAS BEEN SUGGESTED AS LOGICAL SUCCESSOR TO TAJUDDIN, GIVEN HIS MORE MODERATE ECONOMIC STANCE

(ALTHOUGH SIDDIQUI IS ALWAYS BEING MENTIONED FOR WHATEVER MAJOR VACANCY OCCURS.) SINCE IT IS DISTINCTLY POSSIBLE THAT THIS IS ONLY THE FIRST OF A SERIES OF CABINET CHANGES, THERE IS REASON TO THINK THAT MUJIB MAY DECIDE TO HOLD THE FINANCE PORTFOLIO HIMSELF TEMPORARILY, PENDING A MORE FUNDAMENTAL RESTRUCTURING OF THE CABINET.

7. PERHAPS THE CHIEF QUESTION TO RESULT FROM TAJUDDIN'S DEPARTURE IS THE AWAMI LEAGUE'S ABILITY TO REMAIN INTACT. THE RELATIONSHIP OF MUJIB AND TAJUDDIN HAS LONG BEEN CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL TO THIS UNITY. THE ISSUE NOW IS WHETHER TAJUDDIN WILL DECIDE TO LEAVE THE PARTY AND ATTEMPT TO TAKE HIS FOLLOWERS WITH HIM OR WHETHER HE WILL QUIETLY MOVE TO THE BACK BENCHES. THE LATTER POSSIBILITY WOULD SEEM UNCHARACTERISTIC OF HIM.
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